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SUBJECT: RECOVERING FROM DISASTER - A LOOK AT ONE PROVINCE
IN VIETNAM

Ref: Hanoi 2569

1. SUMMARY: A visit to the typhoon stricken province of Thanh Hoa by US Embassy staff revealed a province struggling with slow recovery from the Typhoon Damrey and a recent outbreak of avian influenza in poultry. Damrey damaged or destroyed more than 30,000 houses (out of more than 100,000 in 11 affected provinces), destroyed agricultural land, sea dikes and left thousands displaced and homeless in the province. The typhoon affected some of the most economically underdeveloped areas of Vietnam. The international community responded with over one million USD in assistance, including 50,000 USD from USAID's Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). Provincial officials described their efforts in disaster mitigation planning and preventative measures for avian influenza (AI). However, they stressed lack of resources to provide sufficient direct assistance to residents. They would welcome international assistance for more direct service provision, shoring up and improving sea dikes and the procurement of medical supplies in the event of an avian influenza pandemic. END SUMMARY.

STRONGEST STORM IN TEN YEARS

2. Typhoon Damrey hit Northern Vietnam on September 26, 2005, a storm categorized by the Government of Vietnam as the strongest to strike the country in ten years. With wind forces reaching up to 132 kilometers per hour, the storm reached Beaufort Scale 12 or a Category Two hurricane. The typhoon created storm surges of up to ten feet in the coastal provinces of Quang Ninh, Hai Phong, Thai Binh, Ninh Binh, Nam Dinh and Thanh Hoa and localized flash floods in the northern upland provinces of Yen Bai and Lao Cai. The International Federation of the Red Cross and Crescent (IFRC) reported that more than 100,000 houses were affected by the storm surge and flash floods, hundred of thousands of hectares of crops were damaged as seawater penetrated inland as far as four kilometers. 90 people were reported dead or missing. International donors have contributed over one million USD to disaster relief, while the GVN estimates total damage caused by Typhoon Damrey at 209 million USD.

3. In response to the damage caused by the typhoon, Ambassador Marine declared a disaster (REFTEL) and USAID's Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) mobilized \$50,000 in support to Typhoon affected areas. The NGO Catholic Relief Service (CRS) was selected to implement a project with these funds to supply typhoon affected residents of the costal areas of Thanh Hoa province with shelter assistance, agricultural supplies, repair to dikes and canals and salt production fields. Embassy DCM John Boardman, accompanied by CRS and USAID Vietnam and staff, visited Thanh Hoa on November 4, one of the 11 provinces recently affected by Typhoon Damrey, to assess recovery in the province. The team met with provincial leaders and traveled to the communes hardest hit by the typhoon to speak with local officials and residents.

THE PROVINCE RESPONDS

4. Provincial officials reported that 30,000 houses were damaged; 70,000 hectares of farmland inundated with salt water and 30 kilometers of dikes were damaged in Thanh Hoa. They estimated provincial losses at 83 billion VND (five million USD), a blow to an already poor and under-developed area. At the same time, provincial officials are struggling with typhoon relief, they are faced with the threat of avian influenza; the H5N1 virus has reemerged in poultry in Thanh Hoa and several other provinces within the past few weeks. Provincial officials state they have managed to vaccinate three million of the province's estimated thirteen million

birds and have culled 10,000 birds, but lack supplies to engage in a larger scale culling should the government mandate, and lack basic medical supplies to treat residents in the event of a pandemic.

15. According to the Thanh Hoa People's Committee, the Central Government has been able to only pledge around 300 USD support to housing repair in the Than Hoa, supplemented by another 63,000 USD from province funds. The province has also committed to provide the victims food relief for the next three months and will pay for 50 percent of the seeds needed for winter crops.

A VIEW FROM THE GROUND

16. The team visited local officials and villagers in two of the coastal communes hit by the typhoon. A view from the dirt tracks bisecting the villages revealed poor rural communities likely struggling with economic difficulties even before the typhoon. They now face the prospect of further economic depression as the typhoon wiped out salt production fields and saltwater contaminated much of the rice paddies.

17. Local authorities pointed out houses damaged by the typhoon. Many of the grey cement houses withstood the storm surge and rains. However, a number collapsed while adjacent houses were apparently undamaged. Six weeks after the typhoon, rubble had been cleared, felled trees removed but almost no reconstruction work was evident on the damaged properties. Provincial officials attributed this to difficulties in selecting beneficiaries. Many people wanted housing repair, but according to CRS staff, there is not enough money to go round. One woman stood in the rubble of her home and attempted to clear the bricks by hand while nonplussed provincial officials watched and an accompanying TV crew filmed her labor.

REPAIR OF HOUSES AND LOOKING FORWARD

18. CRS staff added that the villagers had asked for money for crops and cash for work replanting the crops first. Help to undertake housing repair was their second priority. To date, CRS has provided the two communes with potato seeds, cash for agricultural work, and a limited amount of schools supplies to replace those destroyed by the storm. CRS has already transferred money for housing repair to commune officials, but the actual beneficiaries have not yet been selected, as mentioned above.

19. With remaining OFDA funds and their own private funds, CRS plans to assist repairing canals, dikes, salt production flats and provide roofs for some of the houses. CRS adds that the slow pace of housing repair using both CRS and provincial funds can also be attributed to commune level squabbles over selecting beneficiaries. Because funds are insufficient to repair all houses, there has been competition over who receives assistance. (CRS is working with local officials on the problem of beneficiary selection and has developed a transparent beneficiary selection model.)

DISASTER PLANNING

110. The province demonstrated considerable efficiency in evacuation, moving 120,000 people from coastal areas to higher ground in advance of the storm. Villagers reported that busses arrived three hours in advance of the storm and took them to communal shelters on higher ground. Since the event, they have been provided with food and water from the province, and provincial officials said the province and central government would need to continue supplying rice and seeds to ensure food security for the next two months.

111. Provincial officials reported that they have been involved in flood plain mapping in the region, and have an effective evacuation system in place in the event of future storms. A severe storm hits the province every five to ten years, according to local officials. The deputy chairman of the Provincial People's Committee said that they needed international assistance to upgrade the sea dike system. The dikes can currently handle storms up to Beaufort Scale 9 (a severe gale with winds up to 50 miles per hour). Local officials added that flood damaged locations can be expected to be damaged again in the future. In the meantime, they are carrying out local mitigation activities including replanting mangroves, working on evacuation plans and awareness activities to prevent loss of life in future storms.

MARINE